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151237Z Jul 03

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 004352

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STATE FOR NEA/ARN, NEA/PA, NEA/AIA, INR/NESA, R/MR,
I/GNEA, B/BXN, B/BRN, NEA/PPD, NEA/IPA FOR ALTERMAN
USAID/ANE/MEA
LONDON FOR GOLDRICH
PARIS FOR O'FRIEL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR JO](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON IRAQ

Summary

-- Lead stories in all papers today, July 15, and over the past several days focus on the formation of the Iraqi governing council. Coverage has included reference to the body's "limited" powers of authority and questions about its legitimacy with the Iraqi people. One Jordanian daily derided the council's declaration of April 9 ("Occupation Day") as a national holiday. Reports have also continued to emphasize attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq, with one headline on July 15 declaring: "Explosions Shake Baghdad on the Anniversary of July 14," referring to events marking the military coup of Abdel Karim Qassim. Editorials on the issue have been mixed, with "liberals" asking for patience and a chance for the council to succeed, and Islamists and leftists either deriding the council as illegitimate or citing its early formation as proof of the effectiveness of continued armed resistance.

Editorial Commentary

-- "The legitimacy of the Iraqi council lies in quickening the end of occupation"

Daily columnist Sultan Hattab writes on the op-ed page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (07/15): "It is not strange that the formation of the interim council in Iraq is met by such a wave of denunciations and negativity among the Arabs. Many of us have diligently been drawing the lines of what is right and what is wrong for our Iraqi brothers, even before asking the opinion of those people concerned.. I must say that the formation of the interim governing council in Iraq did not meet the Iraqis demands for national democratic rule nor for putting an end to the occupation. Furthermore, the Iraqis did not take to the streets in jubilation. However, the Iraqis, unlike some of their Arab brethren, want to slow down and give this move a chance before judging it. They could not have adopted a negative stand about an arrangement that brings together all their political forces, despite its shortfalls in terms of the absence of those calling for the revival of the monarchy. Yet, since this council is temporary and interim in its nature, these shortfalls can be overlooked while highlighting the positive aspects of it in terms of filling the political void and providing a formula, even though not comprehensive, for representing the Iraqi political society."

-- "A governing council that lacks legitimacy"

Daily columnist Fahd Fanek writes on the back page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (07/15): "Under pressure from the Iraqi resistance, Iraq's governor Bremer was forced to form an Iraqi governing council to be some sort of cover for the occupation before the Iraqi people. The governing council does not represent the Iraqi people, but the party that appointed it, which is the occupation. It cannot be considered a push for democracy, because democracy exists when the people are sought to elect their own representatives.. The reference for the appointed governing council is the occupation. The council may very well turn out to be worse than the occupation and bolder in its wrongdoing. It has already outbid the occupiers when it considered the day of the downfall of Baghdad as a national holiday.. In its press conference, the governing council expressed its antagonism for the Arabs and for the independent media. It attacked Arab regimes and the Arab League for their of Saddam. It also attacked the BBC on the pretext of being biased in favor of Saddam. It attacked Al-Jazirah TV and other satellite

televisions on the pretext that they are instigating the Iraqi people against the occupation. It has stressed that Saddam will not be coming back and that survival is for the American occupation alone."

-- "The interim council is a step in the right direction"

Daily columnist Urayb Rintawi writes on the back page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (07/14): "Whatever is being written or said about the recently formed Iraqi interim governing council, there is one fact that cannot be denied, namely that the council is representative of most, if not all, of the active and influential Iraqi political and religious spectrums and that it is the first council in the history of Iraq where seats are distributed in accordance with the demographic distribution on the ground. The new council, in its formation, job and decisions, is going to face great of criticism. The parties, the people and the tribes who were not represented are going to express their rejection and their doubts. Yet, despite all this, we must say that we are seeing a transitional step in the right direction, a step that paves the way for other steps that will allow Iraq and the Iraqis to get out of the tunnel of the foreign occupation, just as they had been allowed to get out of the tunnel of dictatorship approximately one hundred days before."

-- "Bremer's new council and its many issues"

Daily columnist Yaser Za'atreh writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (07/14): "We are not wrong when we say that the authorities given to the Iraqi interim governing council were the result of the heroic Iraqi resistance which has played on the nerves of Bush and the right-wing in the United States and which has left clear marks on the morale of the soldiers.. The issue here may be a genuine distribution of the cake, as if the occupier has really left the game and given Iraq back to the Iraqis. Yet, close inspection of this issue shows a different story. The new council enjoys only executive authorities, while the veto remains in the hand of the American governor. This being the way it is, these authorities actually relieve the Americans of their burden and rescue them from having the image of the dirty occupier by having a town council that undertakes the tasking of the police and public services. However, matters of sovereignty that affect politics, economy and foreign relations continue to be in the hands of Bremer and his superiors in Washington."

-- "The interim governing council"

Daily columnist Jamil Nimri writes on the back page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (07/14): "International, regional and domestic pressures, and not to forget the armed resistance, have all pushed the occupation administration to establish the Iraqi interim governing council. This step marks a qualitative move, despite the criticisms that accompanied the announcement of the council.. To say that the Americans are entrenching and encouraging sectarianism is completely false, because sectarian division already exists. Let us put the Americans aside. The ball is now in the court of the Iraqis themselves. The current council is tasked with writing the country's constitution, which will either hold on to or exclude any sectarianism. The Iraqis can choose the most advanced and sophisticated of constitutions and can ignore aspects of race and sectarianism. However, we already know two facts. The first is that the Kurds want a federation that would give them a great deal of independence and a major role in the central government, while the Shiites and the Sunnis reject the idea of a federation and prefer administrative decentralization. The second fact is that the Shiites view themselves as having a priority, being the majority, to the presidency of the state. The Sunnis are the weakest party in this equation, something that is difficult to have end in an understanding. But if the Sunnis decide to embark on a historic venture that adopts a formula where all racial, ethnic and sectarianism considerations are put behind them and where the only foundation and principle is Iraqi citizenship, then it would be worth that venture just for the sake of a happy Iraq, even though this might in reality mean that the Shiite majority would take hold of the legislative council and hence the state institutions. What does this matter anyway, if there is no oppression or discrimination against any sect of society?"

-- "A council for Bremer's account only"

Chief Editor Taher Udwan writes on the back page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (07/14): "The birth of the new council in Iraq does not constitute national rule nor an elected council that represents the Iraqi people. This council is the making of an occupation force that invaded Iraq in spite of the opposition of the international community and the United Nations. It would be gravely wrong for the Arab League to reach the point of recognizing this council. Such recognition is going to give legitimacy to the increasing occupations in the Arab world, making Sharon the decider of the fate of the Palestinians, and maybe to others in the future."

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